Jack Green was a good cop. He had joined a LAPD a few years ago and was already a sensation. He was known to make big collars and in a short time he had been able bring down a notorious drug cartel, close down a slew of gambling dens, and get hookers off the streets. It was commendable work and he had the kudos of all the captains and sergeants. In fact, he was the only one with his name inscribed on his locker on a silver plate. It was a pretty nice honor. Although, he could have easily made detective Jack preferred the uniform- the old blue khakis and half-sleeve shirt that was the signature style of the LAPD. He wore a badge like the old-fashioned cops. Everything about him glorified the classic style. He liked it that way. It gave him a sense of stature. It was like armor to protect him from the vicious streets and make him immune to the violence. So when two drug-dealers pulled out guns on a routine assignment, Jack knew exactly what to do. They were backed up in an alley when Jack had cornered them from a tip from an informant. But they were resilient and not prone to give in to authority. This caused some discontinuity in Jack's mind. Would it come down to a duel with two men in an alley like an old Western? Or would they concede and surrender? It was a game of chess and Jack knew that two rooks was better than one king. He would have to come up with a good strategy. Jack had drawn his revolver but the men were holding their own firepower and it was a standoff. If he got one shot off, there was no doubt, the other one would blast him. It was a tricky situation but Jack was cold and icy. He was not going to back down or be intimidated. The men were holding their position, their scowls peering into Jack's soul. In a moment, their fate would be decided. Jack called out to them one final time to lay down their arms. It was to no avail. The men would not budge. That only left one option. One bullet to take out both assailants. Jack had seen it on the nature channel. A hunter had killed a bear and a deer at the same time by directing the bullet through soft tissue. With his firepower- a magnum 45- it was possible. He just needed to have them line up together. That was easy if they played into his web. He would have to duck and take cover at an angle so both culprits would be in one path. It was brilliant. Jack scrambled in a diagonal direction forcing the men to turn on an axis. It was then that he used his fancy gun slinging to let off shot that pierced the collar bone of one of the men and went through the same angle on the other. It was a brilliant shot and it incapacitated both men. They fell to the floor and were shell-shocked. Jack cooly holstered his weapon and called on the radio. He had two men down and backup would arrive to take away the scum. It was a typical day for Jack Green.

Back at the precinct, Jack did the usual paperwork. He had an old desk in a hot room with a solitary window looking out at nothing. It was a drab view. The desk was strewn with papers and reports and looked deluged. It was clear that this was the working station of a busy officer. Jack looked through the heap of papers and found a pad. He uncapped a pen and began writing. He had to write an incident report- "at approximately 501 pm, two perps seen in an alley with contraband. Perps threatened officer with a gun at which point, they were ordered to drop their weapons. Perps were non-compliant. Officer was forced to use deadly force. Perps

were both shot and taken into custody and transferred to Belvue. Contraband was seized and placed into evidence.” Jack leaned back and thought for a moment before writing a final comment- “Perps are really dumb or just plain aggressive-question mark.” Jack studied the note. It seemed to spur more interest.

At Belvue, Jack went up to the 5th floor to inquire about his two collars. He was let in after signing the book and led to separate rooms that were housing the lousy mugs. They were handcuffed, lying down, with a bandage over the lumbar area where the bullet had pierced. Jack entered to moans and grunts. Billy, the young cop, who was keeping guard was having a cup of coffee from one of those self-serving espresso machines. It smelled good as Jack winked and went inside. The first prisoner with the silvery hair that was knotty was lying with his face partially pressed to the pillow and refused to even look up. Jack banged his gun on the bedframe that made him look up. Jack addressed him cooly.

“So that was a quite a risky move,” Jack said cooly,

“What’s it to you pig?” the man replied bluntly.

“Nothing really,” Jack said nonchalantly. “I was just wondering if it’s plain stupidity or you really wanted to take me out.”

“Maybe I did,” the man replied huskily. “I don’t like pigs.”

“Yeah but It was just some dope,” Jack pressed further. “Why take the rap for a hit on a cop?”

“Like I told you, I don’t give a fuck about cops,” the man said even more intently.

“Okay,” Jack replied. “But you’re lucky to be lying here. You could’ve been a casualty.”

Jack went out and looked at Billy who was now reading the funny pages.

“Anything good,” he asked.

“Yeah,” Billy said. “This one’s about a cop who busted a dog peeing in a neighbor’s yard and in the mugshot there’s a picture of Snoop dogg.”

Jack cracked a smile before walking into the adjacent room.

The room was dark with a curtain slightly drawn and a sliver of sunlight peering through. Bandages wrapped around the patient’s neck and collar. An IV was dripping next to him. The man looked at Jack with sideward glance. His eye was bulging like a man looking through a sniper’s crosshairs. He was skeptical and Jack calmly sat on a chair in the corner of the room. The man took out a cigarette and asked for a match. Jack stood up, walked over and lit the cigarette with a zippo. The

man puffed on it in slow drags like the breath was seeping from him. He was in a dire condition but stable.

“So who was the dope for?” Jack asked casually.

“What’s it to you?” the man replied with a congested tone.

“I’d like to know so I can find the source,” Jack angled his response.

“I wouldn’t tell you anyway,” the man said defiantly.

“Don’t you want some immunity,” Jack asked.

“Fuck immunity,” the man cursed him.

“If you cooperate you could beat the attempted assassination,” Jack rationalized.

“I don’t talk to pigs. Get me my lawyer,” the man demanded.

“C’mon, it will only get thicker with shysters. Why not talk to me?” Jack prodded.

“Man, lay off,” the man whined.

“Alright, is the Carmine group,” Jack asked spontaneously.

“What”

He was referring to the Michael Carmine, the most notorious drug dealer on the west coast. A mobster in the classic style who had ties to the all the big crime families. He was known for illicit gambling activities, extortion and murder plots and an illegal drug trafficking trade along the entire west coast. It was highly likely that these mugs worked for Carmine. It was just a matter getting their word of mouth.

“So can’t you bend a little?”

“Screw you.”

“We can give you immunity and witness protection.”

“Shove it up your ass,” the man scowled.

“Okay I hope you like the food in prison. But if you change your mind, just tell your guard you had a change of heart.”

“Drop dead.”

Jack walked out of the room. Billy was now fixing up a turkey sandwich. The mustard was dripping all over his hands and lips.

“So how’d it go?” Billy asked, licking up the mustard.

“Pretty underrated,” Jack replied.

“That bad, huh,” Billy asked.

“You know it,” Jack said timidly.

“Well, there’s other ways they can talk.”

“Sometimes, silence says a lot.”

Jack went back to the office and pulled out the file he had on Michael Carmine. He was involved in everything from high-profile gambling to extortion and intimidation. He had been trying to bag Carmine for years but never had any direct connection or evidence to nail him. Michael was medium-sized height, with blond hair, always clean-shaven and a crew cut. He looked like a Austrian or one of Hitler’s SS. Now he was the top boss of a crime family that stretched across the US. Jack was intent on bringing him down.

Jack went back to his apartment, a chic studio in downtown L.A. The balcony door was open and a cold wind was blowing through the open doors. A beach view outside gave the place a unique charm. Jack entered and untucked his shirt and lay on the leather couch. He placed his feet on the coffee table. It felt relaxing and soothing. His tired achy body seemed to refresh. Jack clicked on the TV remote and leaned his head back. Suddenly, his interest was spurred by the nightly news. A report on a break-in at a recent loading dock caught his attention. The surveillance video showed the same men he had captured that afternoon. So there was a direct link. The facility was counter-run by a competitor of the Carmine’s so there must’ve been some vendetta. Likely, the dope was intercepted and Carmine’s mugs were caught in the act. All Jack had to do now was prove if Carmine was behind it. He would have to interrogate the rival family, the Manetti’s to figure out why.

Jack poured out some juice from one of those Dole cans. It was pineapple. It seemed to relieve his indigestion. He turned the TV off and played some Coletrane. It was a perfect jazzy blend. The acoustics were perfect on his stereo and the equalizer seemed to make the music sublime. Jack entered the shower and stood under the hot water. It seemed to absorb the tension. The water ran over his head in a large cascade and he stood there until the bathroom was full of mist and fog. It seemed like a refuge from the harsh streets. Jack put on a robe and left the misty confines of the shower and lay on his bed. It was firm but cushy. He looked at a picture in a frame on his bedside table. It was a photo of him at the academy. He looked young but now he was now hard and chiseled. The hard streets had changed him but he was a superior cop. There was still a lot more to prove. Jack lay on his bed and let himself fall asleep. His eyes grew heavy and he dozed off until the next dawn.

It was time to pay Manetti a visit. He would have to go through the proper channels. He knew their usual hangout- a pub on Rodeo drive where all the mobsters hung out. It was a private gambling den of sorts with liquor license. Jack entered with an icy appearance. He scanned the room and eyed the suits that were sitting on the tables in a smoke-filled haze. They were dealing cards and chips and sipping on beer from cheap mugs. Every now and then, someone folded and slammed the mug on the table and called out. They were mostly fatheaded, bald men with cheap Italian suits and fat bellies. They were definitely not health-conscious. Jack casually walked up to the bartender.

“Shot of bourbon,” Jack asked cooly.

“Coming up.”

The waiter poured out the bourbon in a long swill. The glass seemed to overflow. The bourbon had a glassy reflection. Jack tossed the bourbon down in one shot. It was a like a jolt and then mellowed out. Jack rested the glass on the table and directed his gaze at the water.

“So where can I find Mr. Manetti,” he asked with an uncanny politeness.

“He’s not here,” the waiter replied bluntly.

“Do you know when he’ll be coming back,” Jack persisted.

“Not sure,” the waiter replied.

“Do you think any of those goombahs might know,” Jack asked.

“You can try but I don’t think they might be too cooperative.”

“Well, it can’t hurt.”

“It’s your call.”

Jack walked over to one of the tables inside an enclosure encompassed by a balustrade. The men were yapping and dealing cards. He observed them. Finally, one of the mugs shot a look at him and winced. He glanced back at this friend and nudged him.

“Hey Ernie, we got company.”

His associate, a dark-complexioned mustached Italian with a fedora and a trimmed goatee shot Jack a look. He seemed to be sizing him up.

“What are you here for pal?” he asked in a cranky way.

“I am looking for Manetti,” Jack said directly.

“Well he ain’t here,” the Mafioso replied.

“Do you know where I can find him?”

“He won’t be here for a while, but maybe we can be of assistance.”

“I wanted to talk to him about the robbery last night.”

“What are you a cop?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, maybe we should just check out your credentials.”

The crook signaled at one of the other tables. One of the bodyguards stood up. Jack looked him up and down. He was a hulking giant, probably over six feet and more than two hundred pounds. He seemed to be bulging out of his clothes. He walked over to Jack and stared him down.

“Nico why don’t you show our good friend some hospitality.”

Nico reached out and laid a heavy hand on Jack’s shoulder as if to pull him aside. Jack looked at the hand from the corner of his eye. Nico seemed to tower over him and his face was tense like Foreman when he fought Ali. Jack knew he was in deep water. The hand seemed to grip his shoulder and squeeze. Jack felt the grip tightening and reacted. He grabbed Nico’s fingers and bent them backwards. He used an arm hold he learned at the academy to twist Nico’s arm and cross-check him. Nico landed on the balustrade, groaning in pain. After a few moments, he charged with a fury. Jack stopped him with a karate blow and successive kicks to disable him. A final side-kick to the chest sent Nico through the balustrade bringing down the barrier and rushing headlong into a coat rack. The onlookers watched in amazement.

“So I was asking about Manetti,” Jack asked the mobsters on the table.

“Okay, okay,” Ernie replied. “He’ll be here around 8 pm.”

“See, now wasn’t that easy.”

Jack took one of the mobster’s drinks and gulped it down. He lowered the glass on the table and grabbed the table with both arms. He leaned forward and gave a stern look to one of the mobsters. He meant business and he wanted to lean on them.

“I’ll be back at eight,” Jack said with conviction and dropped a twenty on the table. “For your trouble.”

Jack took off on Rodeo Drive towards the warehouse where the robbery occurred. He wanted to check it out and make sure there was nothing out of the ordinary the

night of the robbery that he might have missed. He stopped in front of the warehouse, an old deserted building with broken windows and ash and soot from an old fire. There were a retinue of geese congregating around one of the corners. Jack looked up at the bygone structure and felt its lonesome presence. He walked through a hole in the chain link fence towards the loading dock where the shoot-out had occurred. He recalled where the perpetrators were standing and contemplated the entire scene. He experienced a flashback of the night's events in his mind-shooting at the gangsters and outwitting them. They were too combative it seemed. Jack felt someone walking up behind him. He instantly reacted and put the perp in a police hold. To his consternation, it was not a perp but a woman. The red hair was conspicuous. Jack let go. The woman stepped back awkwardly her heels unstable and straightened herself out. She was dressed in a business skirt and a gray vest that was slightly unbuttoned and silk stockings. Her hair was fiery red and her face was blush.

"I am so sorry miss," jack said with total shock. "I didn't realize you were a woman."

"Well take a good look and just make sure there are no doubts," she replied.

"None at all," Jack retorted.

"Well, good," the woman responded. "I'd like to think I have good genes."

"You do."

"My name is Penny Marshall. I work for CTV."

"Nice to meet you."

"You might be wondering what I was doing here. Well whenever there is excessive force used by the department, the station has to do a thorough investigation. I was just here trying to assess what really happened."

"So you're an investigative reporter."

"Precisely."

"Well, I'm Jack Green. Nice to meet you."

"How nice. The cop behind the shooting."

"Well, yeah."

"What a nice coincidence."

"You bet."

"So care to share your version of the story, Officer Green?"

“There’s not much to say. The culprits were armed and dangerous. I reacted with swift force.”

“Well, the manual on police conduct advises to call backup in these situations. Did you call backup?”

“No, there was no time.”

“So was there a violation of the police code.”

“Not when there’s exigent circumstances.”

“Hmm, do you think the public will agree?”

“Lady, I’m an LA cop. I don’t have to justify myself.”

“It would still make for great diner conversation.”

“If you think so.”

“Well, I am sure there’s more to it than meets the eye. Care to share it with me Officer Green? Perhaps, over some daiquiris?”

“Why not?”

They drove in Jack’s red convertible with the roof down. Penny’s red hair blew in the wind and made her look like a divine creature. Her high cheeks and perfect nose and lips seemed to attract Jack’s gaze. She smiled at Jack every now and then as they drove on the Pacific highway. The scene was tranquil and vivid. The oceanfront was long and extended and the beach seemed to be endless like miles of desert. The scene was tranquil and distant. Palms seemed to be windswept. They pulled up to a tavern alongside the beach called The Tulip. It was like a hut in the form of a tavern.

The sat on the patio overlooking the oceanfront and ordered mixed drinks. They came with little umbrellas. Penny sipped her drink from a tiny straw and seemed to be sizing Jack up for an interrogation. Jack calmly sat back and played the possum.

“So what do you like most about being a cop?” Penny asked coyly.

“The long hours,” Jack smiled.

“So what happened on the night of the robbery?”

“Like I said, I was fired upon and I responded with justifiable force.”

“Justifiable.”

“I tried to incapacitate them.”

“I see.”

“So what is your angle?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why does the station care so much about a pair of lousy thieves?”

“They care more about keeping the police department in check.”

“I see.”

“So what was the bounty?”

“200 grams of cocaine.”

“That’s all.’

“Pretty much.”

“So what made you go back to the crime scene today?”

“A hunch.”

“A hunch?”

“I don’t know. I just wanted to make sure everything fit together.”

“Did it?”

“Somewhat.”

“So who did the coke belong to?”

“We believe the Manettis.”

“You mean the construction Moghuls?”

“Yes.”

“Can it be proven?”

“Not without direct evidence.”

“Can’t you get the perps to talk?”

“They are not the type to bend easily.”

“Is there anything else you can do?”

“I’m working on some leads.”

“Like what?”

“Boy, you are persistent.”

“It’s part of the trade.”

“We think there might be a third-party.”

“I see. Is this part of an official investigation or are you just being an LA cop?

“Why don’t you stick around and find out.”

They watched the sun set over the horizon. It seemed like an orange dot against a purple sky. They ordered some clams and beer and had an impromptu meal. It was decadent and savory. Afterwards, Jack escorted Penny out to the Camaro and they rode back to the city limits. The highway was long and barren and the drive was smooth. Jack stopped at a garden complex at Mulholland. Penny got out and seemed tipsy but held her composure. Before parting, she blew a kiss at Jack that seemed playful. Jack smiled but did not give away his attraction.

Jack went back to his apartment for a nightcap. The apartment was a two-story garden complex that was accessed by a spiral stair. It led through an outdoor garden and a verandah. Wild flowers like Columbines seemed to be sprouting everywhere. A glass patio gave a view of the inside of the house. Suddenly, a chair came crashing through the window and two men charged at Jack out of the shadows. There were masked and burly and had clubs. Jack fended off of them quickly, by ducking the club, and flipping the man over. He was hit by the other man but quickly recovered, grabbing the club and knocking it away. It was now up to a hand battle. Jack fended off some blows and was able to get some hooks in. At the same time, the second man grabbed Jack from behind and locked his head in a vise. Jack struggled under the pressure and the man’s heavy arm. His instincts kicked in, and he flipped the man over with a powerful jerk and broke free. The other man came charging at Jack with a fire poker from the barbecue pit. Jack reacted instantly and leaned out of the way, causing the man to fall abruptly over the ledge. Jack looked back on the other assailant who was slowly recovering. He charged at Jack kicking and punching that Jack dodged. They twirled around in an embrace. The man seemed to overpower Jack and seemed to subdue him when Jack used his body weight to flip him over with a powerful rolling maneuver. The man landed on his back and retreated, escaping with his companion through the darkness.

Jack walked into his apartment haggardly. He was spent from the fight. The apartment was in dissaray. The men were probably looking for something. Jack guessed that they were probably hired by Manetti to trash the place and look for any incriminating evidence. Too bad he could not ID them due to their ski masks. If only he could prove that they were hired by Manetti than he would have a good

reason to raid the club. Jack looked around the strewn papers and files that had been rummaged. On top of a heap of papers, was a pen knife that was probably used to break the drawers. It had a strange insignia of a Chinese dragon. It could help identify the men.

Jack changed his clothes and put on a leather jacket. He hopped in the Camaro and headed west toward Sunset. He had a feeling that the pen-knife belonged to someone in China Town. And he had a pretty good idea who might own it. He pulled up to a restaurant called Wa Fungs. The roof was shaped like a Pagoda. The dragon was a symbol of a notorious gang called the Fukuwah. The Fukawah were notorious for selling drugs, extortion, and killing their rivals. Now they were involved in a drug conspiracy linked to the Manettis. Jack had to find out exactly who was on the payroll. The swank restaurant was brimming with patrons dining on exotic Chinese dishes and chattering. Little lanterns hung from the ceilings and swayed in Jack's eye. Jack walked towards the back where he knew the owners congregated who were part of the Fukuwah. No doubt they would know the whereabouts of the perpertrators. Jack walked up to them cooly. They were laughing and playing cards. A plump heavy set Chinese gangster held Jack off with an arm across his chest. Jack reacted by twisting the man's arm and pinning him with a stiff jab in the neck. It got everyone's attention. One of the men had a tattoo that was similar to the image on the knife. It was the gang's symbol. Jack stuck the pen knife in front of him.

"Look familiar," Jack said.

The man looked at him with a blank stare.

"One of your men dropped this on the way out of my house," Jack went on.

Still no answer.

"Listen, if you don't want the police raiding this place, you better talk."

The man seemed unaffected. Jack resorted to more extreme measures. He pulled the man from his chair and flipped him on his back. Then he pulled him back to his feet and threatened him with hot wax from a burning candle holding it close to his cheek. The man finally cracked.

"Okay, okay, it was one of our men."

"What is the connection?"

"The Manetti's want to shut you up so they hired us to shake you down."

"Shake me down, that's all?"

"Okay, okay, they wanted to know if you had any evidence that could put them away."

"What do you get for it?"

"Nothing man. Just a piece of the action."

"What do you mean?"

"They were going to cut us in on a piece of their territory."

"I see."

Jack grabbed some saki from the table. He gulped it down. He took another glass and poured it on the man's pants.

"Cmon man. I told you everything I know," the man begged.

Jack took out a zippo and lit it near the man's crotch. The pants caught fire and the man cried helplessly patting and stamping out the flame.

"Looks like you need to cool down."

Jack took a glass of Perrier and poured it on the man's crotch. The flame went out.

"If you don't want to go to jail, then you'll start cooperating with us."

The man nodded uncontrollably. Jack had made his point. He would need to see Manetti next.

Jack drove down to a parish. He wanted to pay his respects before he visited Manetti. Jack walked up to the Victorian-style Church with a Gothic arch. It looked austere and humbling. Jack entered the church's atrium and walked up to the altar. Everything was quiet and he could feel his breath. Jack observed the sacraments and the cross and thought about his mortality. He was close to his faith and relied on it for insight. Manetti was his biggest threat but no place like here to pacify his fears. He felt strenghened and partook of the sacrament and silently prayed. He hoped it would bring him protection.

At around 9 pm, Jack pulled up to Manetti's lounge and a parked the car around the back where it wouldn't be seen. He strolled inside and eyed the place. The bartender gave him a dirty look. The place was less busy than usual. Only a few card players and a few couples dancing. Jack went straight to the back. He walked through the plaid curtains separating the back room and walked in on Manetti. He was sitting at one of the tables, poring over a hand, a sinister look on his face. He was heavy-set with vexed eyes and a thin mustache. He looked at Jack briefly and looked back at the cards. One of the bodyguaurds stood up. He immediately walked up to Jack but was knocked back with heavy blows. Manetti kept playing cards. Jack stood in front directly facing him.

"My name is Jake Green," Jack addressed Manetti.

Manetti kept minding the cards.

"I am the guy you tried to knock off this evening Mr. Manetti," Jack continued.

Manetti finally looked up.

"Nice to see you're in one piece."

"My condition should be no concern to you Mr. Manetti. You should be worried about the federal charges that will come down on you."

"On what grounds?"

"Extoriion for one," Jack replied. "Also, drug trafficking."

"You have no proof."

"I have the two low-lives you sent to pick up the product."

"They won't cooperate."

Jack paused for a second.

"Sooner or later, Carmine will come looking for you and there's will be an all-out war among the families."

"That's of no concern to you."

"Give up your suppliers and you won't have the FBI breathing down your back."

"I'll take my chances."

Jack winced at Manetti's deflections. He knew the mafioso would not talk or even budge. He needed some other angle. He knew Carmine was lurking in the shadows and some kind of favoritism might help the situation.

"We can indict Carmine on your testimony."

"It won't get you anywhere. Vicent Carmine cannot be prosecuted."

Manetti waved at one his gaurds. The gaurd brought a briefcase and laid it on the table. He opened it. It was full of cash.

"We know cops can be lenient."

"I am not a sold cop."

"Too bad."

Suddenly, two men came at Jack from opposite directions who were hiding in a backroom. One of them lunged at Jack with a bowie knife. Jack leaned out of the

way in the nick of time and the man went crashing into a wall. The second man flew at Jack and tackled him to the ground. They rolled around knocking over chairs and tables. Finally Jack got the upper hand and was able to maneuver on top of the man. They struggled in a fierce whirlwind. When Jack noticed the knife-wielding man poised to attack, Jack swiftly moved out of the way and rolled sideways, forcing the attacker to miss his target and kill his counterpart. Stupefied, he was an easy target for Jack to take out with a quick neck-breaker. The two men lay lifeless on the floor. But Manetti was long gone, and Jack had no clues other than some lousy dead goons and no witnesses.

Jack drove down the Pacific coast towards Penny's apartment. It had been a rough night and he was longing for a woman's company. He pulled up to the driveway and looked up towards her window. It looked dark but he would attempt to ring the bell. Jack pressed the buzzer and waited. There was no answer. After a couple of minutes, he decided to use the second best thing, the balcony. He pulled himself up with his hands and climbed over the terrace. He walked up to the sliding gate and attemped to open it. It slid open and he was inside the garden apartment that smelled like rosemary and mint. He walked around in the dark looking for Penny's bedroom. He did not want to startle her. Jack walked into the bedroom and sat on the bed next to Penny. She was covered in a satin sheet and sleeping statue-like. A cold breeze was blowing through the window. Jack caressed Penny's face and she began waking up. His face was familiar to her and she was not scared. She grabbed Jack's arm and noticed the bruised hand and the cuts from the altercation. Jack leaned closed and they kissed. Soon, they were unrobed and making love under the satin sheets in a fit of ecstasy.

Jack awakened in the middle of the night and lit a cigarrette. The plume of smoke looked blue in the haze. He mentioned Manetti's involvement and his unwillingness to cooperate. He needed some other angle to break the case. Perhaps, Carmine was the key but he was not an easy man to touch. He needed Penny's help. Perhaps, if she could use her sway to get the mayor's office to lean on Carmine, he might be more forthcoming. It was a last resort.

"We cant touch Carmine because he has half the city's prosecutors in his pocket," Jack stressed. "I need some other angle."

"Sure Jack, anything for you," Penny said with a piercing gaze. "He's a big fish."

"Exactly," Jack said. "And he's probably orchestrating the whole cover-up."

"Just don't lose it Jack," Penny asked timidly.

"I'm hanging in there," Jack responded.

"You can't fight this war alone Jack," Penny said apathetically.

"I have to try," Jack said defiantly.

They huddled back in bed and Penny's slender body seemed to wrap up in Jack's arms. They made love again and the shifting moon seemed to cast its white light in a long dial across the room. Jack awakened at dawn and fixed up breakfast for Penny who was still sleeping. He wanted to go down to the hospital and check on his prisoners and question them some more. He left the breakfast on a tray by Penny's bed. She looked like an angel sleeping.

Jack went down to the Unite Methodist Hospital where the prisoners were confined. He took the elevator up to the 5th floor, designated for patients in custody. The hospital seemed quiet and unattended. He walked up to one of the rooms and noticed the watchman gone. He poked his head inside one of the room and noticed the prisoner sleeping. He looked back outsidr and determined whether the gaurd had gone off to the jon. FIrst, he would check the second room. When Jack glanced inside, a man swung at him with a knife. Jack moved out in the nick of time and the knife struck the door and became lodged. Jack grabbed the assailants arm and pummeled him with some karate chops. The assailant grimaced and swung at Jack with a hospital tray. Jack partially dodged it with his arm. The assailant then backpedaled and kicked a large serving tray into Jack knocking him back. Jack stumbled but quickly recovered. He flung the tray out of the way, and lunged at the assailant, throwing him back. They tumbled on the ground, clenching themselves in a fierce embrace. The assailant seemed to have the upper hand when he rolled on top of Jack, but Jack was able to holster his weapon and let off two rounds killing the assailant instantly. The inmate in an attempt to save his own life grabbed the knife that was stuck in the door and came charging at Jack. Jack still in a lying position, let off two more rounds, that struck the inmate at close range with such a powerful force that he crashed throught the window and fell five stories down. It was harrowing encounter that Jack barely averted. Obviously, Carmine had tried to spring his informants. Jack was startled and unsettled.

They found the watchman's body inside one of the bathroom stalls. It was Billy, the rookie. Jack was highly affected and morose. He vowed revenge. For now, he would have to keep the second inmate safe. He was the only one that could potentially connect Carmine to the drug-dealing and now the killing. So he had him tranported to a safe holding cell outside of town. Jack went to a neighborhood bar to lament. It was called the Coyote Bar on Sunset. It was a contemporary bar made to look like a run-down saloon. Jack threw back a couple of shots of gin and tonic. Suddenly, the room looked like a windshield on a rainy night. The lights and clamor of people was disconcerting and disorienting. Jack kepts seeing Billy's face in the mirrors and reflections. He was too good a kid to die so young. Jack spent the rest of the night at the bar or intemittently sprawled out on the floor of the bathroom, and finally laid in the back of a cab in a drunken stupor. He awakened the next day in his bed with a massive hangover that required Aspirin and sedatives to overcome. He needed to get back on his feet.

He looked like hell. There were bags under his eyes that showed in the rearview as he drove up the Pacific coast in a whirlwind. All the time, he was thinking about Billy and his innocence. Poor kid who didn't deserve it. Jack was in flames over it. But he would have to keep his cool if he was going to get close to Manetti and his operations. He knew where to stop first. He would ride by the Chinatown mews where the prostitutes liked to hang out. He was sure one of them would give up the goods. Jack rode up to one of the backalleys that was a hot spot and parked the car. He looked out into the alleyway for a good target. He noticed a couple of girls talking to some strangers who were frequenting the bar. One of them with the red dress looked like she could be Carmine's lotus flower. He would need some way to break the ice. Jack walked up to them in a cool manner. He didn't want to give up his identity as an LA cop so he kept his eyes low. The girls immediately gave notice and gave him some sexy looks like cats purring in a kennel. Almost immediately, a rowdy patron popped out of the bar and crashed into them, grabbing their thighs and buttocks and pressing on them. When they seemed disinterested, he noticed Jack and snarled. He wasn't going to give up his catch. He approached Jack and slurred some obscenities like "back off cop", that was totally unexpected and "take a hike fag," that Jack blew off. Then he tried to put his hands on Jack sloppily that Jack averted with some quick defensive tactics that ended with the man in a full nelson and subdued. He quickly ran off leaving Jack alone with the cougars.

"So what can I do for you mister," one of the blondes asked playfully.

"I was more interested in your friend," Jack remarked politely.

"Sure. I'll leave you two to get acquanted," the blonde retorted through some drags of a cigarette and walked off.

The girl with the red dress pulled closer to Jack until their bodies and breaths were air tight. Her body was heaving but Jack ignored her comings-on.

"So what can I do for you," she purred.

"Well, I have something for Carmine. Do you know where I can find him?"

"Are you a snoop or something."

"No I just have a delivery for him."

"What kind of delivery?"

"A little commission for some high-end product."

"Why don't you give it to him yourself."

"I am third-party. Our operation is hot. I am just a middleman."

"I don't know."

"Cmon, I'm sure he'll be pleased and you might get a nice cut."

"I am not his regular or nothing."

"It's okay. Just let me know if he might be seeing you and I'll make the drop."

She wrote the name of a bar on a piece of paper. Jack had a good clue.,

"So you don't want nothing else pretty boy?"

"I'll take a rain check."

Jack left the scene nonchalantly with the tip. He would definitley catch Carmine by surprise.

Jack drove up to Penny's apartment to check on her. It was a mild day, with the palms grazing in the sky in an ethereal way. The weather was humid and hot and the pollen was thick and moist. He pulled up to the driveway and walked around the car and confronted the swarms of flies with his hand that were hovering in the hot wind, finally, walking through the gate up to the apartment. He rang the bell that chimed like a church bell and waited at the doorst

It was a mild day, and the palms were dancing in the wind over the long stretch of highway. It was muggy like a boxer's glove and everything felt moist and wet. He finally reached the apartment and parked at an angle in front of the house so that his car wouldn't be blocked. He walked up to the door and rang the bell. Penny opened it and looked heavenly in her half-woke state and greeted him. She was warm and supple like a newborn in bed. Jack felt a deep tie.

They walked into the living room that was lush with carpeting, vases and ceramic tiles that looked Moorish. Penny walked up a desk, opened the drawer and removed a stack of papers. She held them out to Jack.

"What's this?" Jack asked peevishly.

"It's a dossier on Carmine."

"What kind of dossier?"

"It's a financial dossier. I was able to get a subpoena for his financial records to find out what he has up his sleeve, you know. You'd be suprised what kind of contact he has."

"How did you get one?"

"Let's just say we have friends in high places."

"So what's in this."

"Real estate records, financial records, bank accounts. Everything Carmine has kept under the rug. He owes the IRS a lot of money. Maybe, the pressure is getting to him and he's trying to take out the rival families. Also, one interesting fact. He owns in an island off of Cuba. It's small but chances are it's the source of a lot of illicit drug trade. He's probably using the island to offshore the drugs and fly them out to states on non-commercial aircraft. Do you think that might be circumstantial."

"It sure is. This is a gold mine. I think I get a warrant based on these records if everything checks out."

"I'm sure it will."

"Thanks sweetheart."

"Don't mention it."

For a moment, Penny looked like an angel, untouched and unblemished and unlike the heinous sights that Jack was accustomed to seeing at his work. She was an image of pure innocence and cleanliness and Jack savored this immaculate vision. He would seal it in his heart.

"So what's next," Penny asked.

"Well, I have to track down Carmine."

"Any luck."

"I might have a lead."

"Good. Do you think it's solid."

"It should be. I just have to play my cards right for Billy's sake."

"Don't blame yourself."

"I am not. But I am not going to lie down either."

"I am with you."

"Thanks."

"Anything else that I can do in the meantime."

"Just be the apple of my eye."

The next day, Jack pulled up to the bar known as Singh's Tavern to eye the location. If the hooker showed up, he would be on the right track. He saw some two-bit thugs in cheap suits loitering outside. They were antsy and shuffling around waiting for someone. Jack kept a close eye from across the street behind the tint of the

convertible. The men seemed to give up and whisked into the bar. A few minutes later the hooker who tipped Jack off showed up in a cab. She looked worried and a bit unkempt. Jack waited furtlvely in the blindness of the alley. A few moments later the men came back out of the bar and confronted the girl. She was shaking her head in denial. They didn't seem too happy with the missed drop. Apparently, Jack was on a menu and he had skipped the ambush. A limousine pulled up. It was all black and stylish. A man in a brown suit stepped out. It was Carmine in all his glory-puffing a cigar and peering out behind thick lenses. He gave the men a look and graced into the bar. Next the men, ordered the hooker to leave the scene and retreated into the bar. Jack now had his chance to lean on Carmine. He strolled into the bar in his usual cool manner. The bar was dimly lit and with wooden tables and chairs and creaky floorboards. The air was misty and dense. Jack strolled towards the back where the mafiosas were encircling one of the tables. He was met with a roundhouse punch that almost knocked him and made him stumble. Jack recovered and straightened himself out. He was bleeding from the mouth and wiped it off with his shirt sleeve. The man hovered over him with a piercing stare. He was muscular and chisel-faced. Jack asked for a wipe. The man gave it to him and he was able to clean up the blood.

"That's a pretty good introduction," Carmine exhorted from his corner. "Jack Ryann, I presume."

Jack took a step in Carmine's direction under the close scrutiny of the bodygaurd.

"What brings you to our humble establishment."

"There is a drug war taking place on the street Mr. Carmine," Jack iterated. "Only you can stop it."

"I'm sorry Jack," Carmine said raspily. "I have no control over the turf war. This is only business."

"Mr. Carmine, you have it in your power to call it off and for your men to step down."

"I am sorry Jack. We have to take back control over the streets or all hell will break loose."

"All hell is breaking loose now."

"That's the price we pay to be on top."

"Can't you make an exception."

"I'm sorry Jack. In a Sicilian war, there are only losers. But as they say in Sicily, the man who dies for honor is the best man."

"You can't believe that."

"I do."

"Then I have only one choice. I have to bring you in on a warrant."

"It will never stick."

"We have reason to believe that you are violating the RICO law."

"No judge will try me in this town."

"You really think you can buy the system."

"Why not?"

The tall, musular man leaned closer and pulled Jack with a fierce tug. Carmine stood up and fixed himself. The other man who was protecting him, focused on Jack, and cold-cocked him with a right. Jack tumbled and flipped. The heavy-set man delivered a nasty kick that threw Jack back down and laid him flat. Jack groaned hoping to amasss some strength. As the man closed in, Jack recovered and rammed the man with his shoulder. The man fell over a table and crashed down. Jack turned to the second man and hurled him through the air and into the liquor. The men were subdued but Carmine had artfully managed his way through the exit and was _____. Jack had missed his chance.

He would have to seek out the hooker to get any closure. Perhaps, she would cooperate now that the cat was out of the bag. Jack went down to Hollywood Boulevard where the hookers would normally cruise. It was late and the sun was peering like a red orange over the boulevard. The hookers in lingerie, tights and showy miniskirts walked up and down the strip. The redhead was absent. Jack waited patienly hoping for a break. Then, by some sheer luck, the redhead showed up with a pack of other girls who seemed like they were partying. Jack pulled up to the pack and signled out his tipster. It drew a shocking look and finally compliance and she voluntarily entered the car.

They talked while Jack made passes. She admitted to not trusting Jack and being afraid. But maybe, now she would cooperate since her associations had become too tense. The mobsters were leaning on her and were too controlling.

"Can you tell me anything about Carmine's whereabouts?"

"Only that he frequents the bar from time to time and has a yatcht."

"Anything ele."

"He also has a villa out in the country but he's rarely there."

Given the circumstanes and the heat on Carmine, Jack presumed this would be the perfect place for Carmine to elope.

"Can you tell me where the villa is located?"

"Basically, some of the girls go up there from time to time to entertain. It's pretty out of the way."

"Do you know where it is."

"Sure. But I have to warn you. It is heavily gaurded."

"I'll take my chances. With Carmine on the loose, there's no telling what can happen."

"No problem. I'll do anything to get him off my back."

"Thanks. You're a real sport."

"I don't mind putting my neck out sometimes."

"You're really something."

"Hey, are you sure you don't want to try the specials."

"Thanks but I'lll pass."

Jack had Carmine by the toes but first he would have to sort out the turf war. Jack was back on the streets of Chinatown. He needed a substantial link to tie Carmine to the illicit drug trade. Chinatown was the perfect cover for Carmine to funnel drugs and money. But it was obscure and rife with gangs and violence. No one would ever come out of their shell. Jack paced the forlorn streets that seemed empty and barren due to the gangs. He walked under the flickering neon lights of the Chinese bars and taverns hoping for a break. The streets were wet and damp from the afternoon rain and he walked in puddles that seemed to be somber and forlorn. Occasionally, he saw someone step out of the bar with their dates and scamper into the back of a limo and ride away too fast to be noticeable. This was the underbelly of the Chinese mafia and to inflitrate it was nearly impossible. Jack waked into one of the spas with a sign outside that said "Come in for an unforgettable time." It was a worth a shot. Perhaps, something might lead him to Carmine's layer. Jack was greeted by a woman who looked like real-life Geisha. She was wearing a kimono. She asked Jack what was his pleasure as he looked askance at his surroundings. Perhaps, this was a illicit den of the Yakuza. Jack asked for a oil massage hoping it would buy time as he assessed the situation. It was not common protocol but he was a believer in improvisation. The woman led him to a back room that was secluded and walled off by bamboo. It was a small space fixed with a bed and some dim lights. The woman gestured at Jack to remove his clothes. Jack took off everything but his boxers and played it off shyly. The woman left the room to procure the necessary oils and supplies. When she returned Jack pulled her into the room and handcuffed her to the bed post. He revealed his badge and asked her to

be quiet. He made his way out of the room stealthily hoping to find some of Carmine's associates. It was highly likely that this sex establishment was probably run by the Chinese mafia. Jack crept through the hallway and inspected the premises. Finally he reached some stairs that led down to a lower basement where he could hear voices. Jack ventured down trying not to make a sound. When he reached the botom, he could make out some figures sitting at a table. They were playing cards and chatting. This was the perfect ambush.

Jack crept up towards them trying to assess the situation. There were four Chinese natives sitting around a card table. He didn't notice anybody else. The basement was dimly lit and stacked with boxes and imported Chinese beer and condiments. Jack wondered what else could be in the boxes. He walked up to a stack of boxes and inspected them. He took out a knife from his waist and cut the cardboard and split it. A white substance poured out and Jack inferred that this was cocaine. Undoubtedly, this was an outpost of Carmine's and a drug den with a massage parlor as a front. It was incredible luck. Jack uncovered a huge stash and no doubt, the Chinese thugs were on the payroll. Jack unwittingly knocked over a empty gasoline container. It made a sound like a thud which made the Chinese thugs jump out of their seats and hone in on Jack. Jack braced for a quick bout. One of the Chinese goons, the shortest one, ran out from the pack, in a frenzy and in attack mode. He had the look of a fierce dragon and wielded a knife, and seemed completely irascible. Jack braced himself for a tough tussle. He relied on his own sense of martial arts and paused hoping to use the attacker's own momentum against him. It worked flawlessly. When the man approached, with the knife drawn and extended, Jack grabbed his hand, blocking the weapon with the other, and hurling the man into a wall. Knocked out of breath, Jack proceeded with a straight kick to the man's chest that invoked a groan and a sudden collapse. With one man down Jack turned to the other three. He approached hoping to outmaneuver them. They surrounded Jack as he took a combative position like that of a kung fu fighter. Jack scanned elliptically with his eyes. He relied on his intense training as a martial artist prior to joining the force when he trained with Sensei Horishima in one of the most traditonal Chinese dojos in San Francisco. This was the time to prove his composure. He knew when you are surrounded to rely on your instinct. He sensed the man behind him move, and he reacted with a back kick that sent the attacker falling back. Now it was time to concentrate on the other two. One of them pulled a blade and Jack confronted him but was sliced across the arm that left a bleeding cut. He winced and balked but not enough to back down. When the man attempted a second swipe, Jack artfully ducked, grabbing his hand and undoing the knife and incapicating him with a quick elbow. The man was neautralized. Finally the third man took his shot flying at Jack with punches. Jack dodged and ducked like a trained boxer warding off the left and rights, Finally, like a golden glove he deliveered his own combo, a jab and two crosses, and the man was trounced. It was time to take out the first man who was just recouping. But Jack knew he needed this one for

inform. So Jack simply pulled out his .22 that was fitted with laser scope and aimed it at the man's chest. He was not going to move with a bulleye on him.

Jack called for backup and within hours, the police had secured the premises and started evidence gathering. Meanwhile, Jack confronted the starlted last man about the whereabouts of Carmine. He was initially quiet but the threat of a massive charge for drugs, loosened him up.

"If you cooperate with us, you can get us some immunity," Jack coaxed.

"I don't need no immunity," the man blurted out.

"Just tell us if Carmine is behind this and you can get a break," Jack reiterated.

"I told you I am not playing your game," the man deflected the offer.

"Listen, you can' beat this alone. You have to help us."

"I don't need your charity."

"Just tell us whose supplying the shipments and we''ll do the rest.

"We just gaurd the stash man. We don't call the shots."

Jack seemed exasperated. This was going nowhere. One of the uniforms walked up to Jack and whispered in his ear. Apprarently, there were logs of the shipments inside a desk drawer and texts on a cellphone from one of the suppliers. They could easily setup a sting operation.

Jack turned to the man in custody. "Guess what. We have a little drop to make."

They setup at Pier 36 on the LA seaport. It was an out-of-the-way location and discreet. The Chinese informant would meet with the supplier here. He was told to stick to the script and be very forthcoming. He agreed due to the hard evidence that was collected at the crime scene. The surveillane team would be looking out from a crow's nest across the street, an abandoned warhouse that used to be a fishing distribution plant. The team perched atop the roof and were ready for the drop. Ryan was up front and a cop named Alex and Michael joined him. They had long-distance binocs and scopes that could easily spot the targets. The informant was wearing a wire and they could hear every word on their long-range headsets. A squad car was waiting around one of the street corners in case of backup. The informant was in position and was casually pacing the pier. It was a sunny afternoon and the weather was so perfect that the sky was a perfect clear blue. As they looked out, a black car pulled up with TLC plates. Out stepped a couple of Mexican gangsters with goatees and short buzzed haircuts. They were deadpan like a couple of hitmen. They were carrying a black briefcase and their clean-cut appearance was too good to be true. They greeted the informant who exchanged some glances and handshakes. If these were the transporters who were flying dope out of Cuba on

secret planes and disseminating it in LA, this could be a giant score. The surveillance team looked out anxiously. One of the men opened the briefcase and displayed it to the informant. It looked like it was neatly packaged with cocaine. This meant that the hand-off would seal the deal. As the informant extended the money out to the wiseguys, something unexpected happened. Apparently, he had tipped them off with some kind of sign and all three dispersed, with the informant entering the car and going out of view. The team scramled to locate the targets. Everything seemed to slow down for a second like a dead silence. Jack crazily scanned the location with the bi's trying to pinpoint the marks. He finally gave up and tossed the bi's out of the relied and relied on his scope. Suddently, gunfire rang out from behind some steel fencing. Bullets hit the embankment on the rooftop and shattered some windows below. The gangsters were willing to shoot it out. The cops returned fire hitting the steel posts and several bullets riddled the outside of the black limo. The desperados returned their own fire, this time from an AK-47 that pinned the cops behind the embankment. Jack wanted to take them alive so he used the best thing. He launched some tear gas into the hotzone and hoped it could turn the tide. The tear gas consumed the pier but suprisingly, the men had oxygen masks so they were unaffected. By now, the limo had done a semi-circle around the pier and was ready to whisk off the diehard bandits. As they made a dash to the car, Alex hit one with his sniper rifle. Suprisingly, the man got up from the blow and it was clear he was wearing a bullet-proof vest. Jack called on the radio and asked the squad car to hem in the limo. No sooner had the men got in that the squad car crashed into the front bumper like a kamikaze and dragged the limo back on its screeching tires. It finally came to a stop when it hit a oil truck and was sandwiched. All three occupants ran out while the back-up unit could not exit their own vehicle due to massive damage. This was the cue for the squat team to move in. They descended the warehouse and were now chasing the suspects through the large port. They split up hoping to corner the men and seal off their escape. Jack ran through the heart of the large nexus of hangars that were connected. He was directly behind the informant who was running in front of him. Alex came on the radio and yelled "Duck" prompting Jack to fall back and do a barrel roll and sweep out of the way. Apparently, he was running into an ambush that Alex called and took out with massive precision and head shot from a semi-automatic. It was a close call and Jack was relieved. That left two. Michael had closed off the exit at the farthest end and easily subdued the informant with a tranquilizer gun. The infromant who was harried and breathless, gave out and crashed. That left one man. But both Alex and Jack had lost him. That meant he was lurking in the pier. They split up and tried to investigate. Jack walked around some crates and containers stealthily looking around and checking every corner. Alex was tailing him and quietly surveying the highs and lows. A pigeon flew out of the rafters and made both men perk up. It was a false alarm. Alex's finger moved off the hair trigger. They kept scouring the locaton. The man had to be hiding somewhere. They met at a confluence and were both at a loss as to the man's whereabouts. He couldn't have simply vanished. Alex tapped on the floorboards. They were creaky and old. The

man could've easily slipped into the water. They walked around looking for openings or a manhole. Alex's attention seized upon a grate that seeemd slightly open. He leared in and was hit by a bullet that pierced his shoulder causing the hangar to be filled wih a boom. The lurking man jumped out, and made a dash, prompting Jack to give chase. But when the man stopped to finish off Alex, and was standing over him like an executioner, Jack had appeared from out of his blindside and tackled him. Despite the man letting off an errant shot, Jack was in control, and subdued him pinning his arms and shoulders and immobilizing him.

A medical emergency team showed up within minutes and tended to Alex and the injured cops. They wheeled away one dead gangster and Alex only had a superficial wound. The good guys had won but at what cost. It seemed that no one was willing to talk or to cooperate with the investigation. What would convince them that anything might change now that they had an insider in custody. They whisked the Mexican to an interrogation room in the precinct. A Spanish interpreter had to be present. They were all seated around a large metal table. The informant had a leary look. Jack looked at him directly, trying to search his eyes for any meaning or clues. They had a deep vacuity. If Jack was to get anywhere, he needed to know who was behind the drug exchange. Whether Carmine had ordered the pickup and where to find him. Or at least, who was the supplier so that they could bring an end to Carmine's empire.

"Cigarette?" Jack asked with earnestness.

"Si", the informant nodded. Jack handed him a cigarrette from an opened pack. He lit it and took a long drag.

"Who ordered the pickup?" Jack asked bluntly.

"I don't know," the informant answered noncommittaly.

"That's hard to believe," Jack replied. "You were at the scene. You were part of the operation."

"I don't know anything," the informant said evasively.

"C'mon, don't beat around the bush," Jack pressed on. "You are working for the cartel."

"No, no," the man denounced. "I don't know anything."

"We know that the Carmine is flying drugs out of Cuba and you are one of his soldiers."

"No, no. I don't know anyone."

"Who is your supplier?"

"Fuck you."

Jack knew he was at a impasse. The man would never talk with his back against the wall. Jack would have to use some other kind of tactic. He wondered if a picture of the man's family would do the trick. Jack had requeste a background check and had located the man's family who lived West of Burbank. Perhaps, some sentimentality would creep in. The man looked at the photo and seemed moved. He clenched his fists and sweat trickled down his cheek. He seemed irascible.

"What do you want?"

"Just tell us the name of the go to man and we'll do the rest."

"We only bring the contraband to a drop-off location."

"Where is the location."

"It's a hangar by the airport."

"The LAX."

"No, Burbank. It's private. We never see anyone. We leave the goods. Their men pick it up after we leave."

"How do you get the instructions."

"A phone. It's untraceable."

It seemed that Jack had his first legitimate clue into the drug trafficking trade. The drugs and goods were being exchanged out of an airport and the Mexicans runners were doing the dirty work. Men were conducting all of Carmine's business in cognito. He would have to inflitrate the aiport in order to shut down their operation. It was a tall order but Jack was up to the task. Carmine had to be stopped and before word spread among the other camps, the Carmine was selling out to the Cubans, and undermining Manetti's operation, all hell would break loose. He would have to dismantle the secret smuggling operation before he hit Manetti on the streets and dealt with the Chinese mafia. To bring Carmine down, would take a battlecry.

They setup a surveillance operation near the airport. It was an indescript airport with one runway and a military hangar, that probably dated back to WWII. It seemed little used and a few private planes scattered the runway. Dim lights stretched across the desert to light the runway. It was an arid day with a lot of dust in the air. The men were gathered a few miles off near a dune with scopes and infrared. They were eyeing everything, making sure there were no big surprises. The infrared showed one man in a watchtower who was probably Cuban and keeping an eye out. The hangar was mostly dark and inscrutable. But every now and then a couple of men came out and loaded a pallet from one of the birds and

brought it back inside. It definitely looked like a smuggling operation. The team was spread out in a semi-circle around the hangar and had orders to barge in from all corners like a SWAT operation. They didn't want any missed opportunities. Jack was joined by a couple of tactical experts named Bill and Dan. They were the best in the business. They had even infiltrated the Desert Inn Hotel in Las Vegas when terrorists had taken over the landmark in a bid for US departure out of Iraq. Bill and Dan were in full camo. The other team members were decked out in black camo suits with stripes that looked snake-like. Everyone had on night vision goggles. They needed some kind of a decoy in order to raid the hangar and Jack knew the perfect plan. If they had one of their own planes fly in, maybe the bandits would be distracted long enough for the team to step in. It was all or nothing. They waited for an all clear from their tower for a soft landing by an army plane. A small Cessna would be a perfect decoy and the pilot would fake soem kind of medical emergency to buy time. The team would use military jeeps to encircle the compound. They were all anxious and hot to get close. Everyone had walkie--talkies and state-of-the-art communication system to stay connected throughout the whole operation. Jack tested his headset.

"This is Alpha One to Green team, come in," he rasped.

"Affirmative, this is Green team, we hear you loud and clear," came back with the reply.

"Copy, Green Team. Await for touchdown."

"Roger that Alpha one. Do you have any special requests."

"Just a bucket of Kentucky fried chicken," Jack joked into the mic.

The small Cessna that was ordered by the military came into view above the sunset and whirred in the distance, angling for a touchdown. It reached closer and closer until lights pointed at it from the watchtower, acknowleding its presencce. It was time to charge the compound. The military jeeps started up and in an eye formation, began rolling towards the fenced airport. It was a simulatenous drive towards the target and the five jeeps looked like beetles moving across a open horizon. The men were braced for a large-scale attack but it seemed that their decoy was keeping the guard occupied. The pilot was doing a good job keeping their attention. As the jeeps came within five hundred yards, the gaurds finally noticed, and scrambled in all directions, ducking into the compound. Finally, the elite team had reached the perimeter and the jeeps swooped in on the compound, crashing through the barbed wire and chain-link fence. The firefight had officilly begun. One of the jeeps was hit by rocket launcher that only damaged its side and was spared. Simultaneously, bullets pierced through the hangar windows and stymied the US forces. For now, they were walled in on all sides. They needed to address the rocket fire. A remoted controlled detonator would blow the watchtower to smithereens. They needed to plant the explosive. But the heavy fire was keeping

them at bay. Jack came in on the radio. "Green team, execute eagle maeuver." Immediately, the back up team exited their vehicles, and fired smoke canisters into the hangar. In the melee, the weapons expert was able to light a fuse at the base of the watchtower that blew it to smithereens. The rocket attack was subdued. The smoke and fire seemed like small eruptions across the vast plateua. Bravo team could now enter the location. Jake led the charge. The team surrounded the compound and would enter all at once and take out any mercenaries. Jake was at the east door of the hangar and was ready to break it down. The radio cracked, "Move in". At the command, the forces moved in, entering the bellows of the hangar from all sides, taking out the Cuban resistors. They used smoke grenades and gas to debilitate their adversary and were easily able to pick off their positions. There were approximately fifty men gaurding the compound and several were killed and many simply surrendered. Bill and Dan had effectively rigged the compound with motion sensors that was crucial to detecting any rebels. The men were rounded up like cattle and cuffed with zip ties to secure them. In the end, the raid turned up a hundred kilos of Carmine's dope in one of the local Cessnas and it was enough to bring a case against Carmine. More importantly, a major drug trafficking operation had been shut down.

Jack needed a little furlough. He had been working long hours and was exasperated. He needed to get away. He rode down the Pacific highway that was long and endless like a deep sleep. It was beautiful and serene like a woman’s silk gown. The coast was dark and mysterious. The tide was crashing into the rocks with heavy bellows. The dark blue ocean seemed to transcend the mind and captivate Jack. He rode along the cliffs overlooking the bay and passed several coastal towns and cities that gleamed in the moonlight. He even saw a lonely watchtower with its light scanning the waters and heralding ships in the rough tide. He felt himself like that light-tower, standing alone and erect in the midst of a maelstrom. The wind was gusty and warm like a tropical breeze. He exited the parkway and drove over to Penny’s place to reconcile with her. It was late but the late hour did not faze him. The apartment was sitting in darkness. He would have to use the spare key. He entered the abode and quietly took off his shoes. He walked through the man-made arboretum that was a main feature. The exotic flowers and vines made it seem like a heavenly garden. The arboretum seemed safe and immaculate. It was a situated on the balcony top in a perfect nook. A white balustrade ran along its side and made it look like a medieval sanctuary. Windows on top of the arched pavilion would let in light and air. The plants seemed to be thriving and flourishing. Trickling water could be heard in the silence. As Jack approached the exit, he was knocked back by a blow. He landed flat on his back and was hit by some kind of a rubber mallet. It was one of the pimps. Apparently, he had tracked down Jack and wanted a payback. The pimp, walked over and kicked Jack in the abdomen. He yelled expletives. Jack groaned and rolled on his back. “I want my money,” he blared over and over again. “I don’t know what your talking about,” Jack said in a confused state. “My money fool,” he repeated. “You ruined the girl. She can’t work in this town no more.

Everyone knows you’se a informant.” To this, Jack could only deny the accusation, claiming that he was not involved. “I don’t know anything about it,” he said. “Sure you don’t,” the angry, hostile pimp exclaimed. “You better give me my money.” Finally, Jack was facing the butt of a .22 caliber revolver and the pimp was ready to execute his revenge. At that moment, a sudden blow from behind brought the pimp crashing down on the floor. It was Penny. She had busted a pot over his head. Jack came to his feet and was relieved to see Penny. “Who is he?” he asked. “Just a thug working the strip,” Jack explained. “We hired one of his girls to drop a dime.” Penny was startled. “How the hell did he find us?” Jack could only give one explanation. “The 10 o’clock news.”

Jack sat by an orange grove in his favorite part in LA. It was secluded spot outside the city on a hill that merged with the elite suburbs. The oranges were in bloom. They were sweet and ripe. The flavor filled his senses. The hill overlooking countryside was a perfect spot for recollection. He sat meditatively like a Buddhist contemplating the world. The sun was a perfect warmth and it felt cool in the shade of the tree. Penny was picking flowers. They were enjoying a perfect summer day in the fields. It was relaxing and therapeutic, to get away from the constant drama and miserliness of the city. It felt like a parallel universe. A flock of ravens picked at the grass. The chaos of the city seemed to be trivial in the face of a natural landscape. Carmine’s days were numbered. It was only a matter of time that Jack would bring him down and it seemed more evident in a place of Zen. Penny leaned back on Jack and rested her head on his arm. They watched a rabbit pop up in the fields and then scurry away into a borough. It was eye-opening and they smiled at the antics of the furry creature. They dozed off on the tree and cuddled in a ball. After awhile, they awakened and felt rested and renewed. Penny kissed Jack and he pondered about her affections. Later, they drove through the meandering country roads admiring the houses and haystacks.

Jack dropped Penny off at her apartment around six in the evening. It was a dusky evening. A California twilight seemed to have befallen the city. The sunset seemed like an arc in a painting. It shed an orange hue on the tops of the white marble roofs of many of the palatial homes like a woman’s rouge. It was a romanticized feeling. Penny blew Jack a kiss before walking up to the gate. He winked at her and felt reassured. There was still a lot of investigating to do. First of all, he needed to dismantle the Yakuza’s before stepping on Carmine’s toes because there could be retaliation. There was a blood war going on and all sides needed to be excoriated. If one side was avenged the other side would let loose. He needed to stop the turf war from escalating and for the Chinese thugs to back off. But for that to happen he needed to make a deal with Manetti. Would he let go his powerful hold or continue to rule Chinatown with iron fist. Jack needed to make some slick moves.

Jack went back to the Shanghai bar where he knew the Chinese thugs would be congregating. He wanted to track down their leader Jason Chang, the notorious kingpin of the opium trade. He was Manetti’s second-hand and If Jack could bring

him down, Manetti might be more amenable. The bar seemed closed from the outside and the lights seemed to be subdued by the evening mist. The alleyway which protruded from the side seemed to be overtaken by fog and haze. Everything seemed dark and obscure. Jack ventured up to the bar and looked through the stained glass windows. The bar was closed but he saw some movement behind the bar and some shadowy figures lurking in the corners. He knew the Yakuza were in town and could give him information. Jack knocked on the door hoping for an answer. Finally a hulking Chinese bartender that seemed to be a towering figure answered it. Jack saw the opportunity to lay out the muscle. He knew there was no polite way to handle this so he commenced with a sharp knee to the groin and a left hook that knocked the giant cold out. There was no time for pleasantries. Jack walked into the bar and noticed that all the Yakuza had spread out and were taking aim from their automatic weapons behind tables and chairs. There was no doubt that they would not guard their dominion. Jack knew he would have to be a one-man army. Suddenly, everything seemed to be moving in slow-motion and Jack could easily pick off the targets. He cocked two pistols with the shells disengaging, and fired several rounds at the attackers from a crouched position. Bullets riddled the wooden chairs and tables and whisked passed heads. One of the Chinese gunmen was hit and screamed in pain as Jack tumbled across the tiled floor and diving fired additional rounds. More bullets smashed the walls and hemmed in the assailants. Their simple artillery was no match for Jack’s heavier firepower which were two semi-automatics firing in unison. Jack ducked behind a wall that was just a simple pillar in the banquet-style café. For several seconds, bullets pounded on the wall on his back as Jack listened and kept calm. Finally, when it was time to reload, Jack had the opportunity to peek out and with excellent precision took out the remaining targets with precise headshots. The Chinese gunmen fell back like out from a nest. The smoke and heavy gunpowder filled the air in a grim scene. A garbling voice seemed to be emanating from the wreckage. Jack walked over to one of the men who was lying on the floor, bleeding from a shot in the leg. It was Jason Chang, noticeable from the scar under his left eye when he was cut in a fight with a local pimp over a Chinese hooker that had made him somewhat of a folk hero for saving an Oriental damsel. Jack smiled at him, knowing that he was in his clutches (or the culprit was bagged). He removed Jason's glasses and said hello in Chinese. The culprit blinked under the bar’s fluorescent lights.

“Ni hao,” Jack said. “Do you know who I am?”

“No,” Jason replied adamantly.

“Jack Green. LA cop. Do you know why I came here?”

“Why,” Jason said irritably.

“For your confession.”

“Screw you.”

“I don’t think you have much of a choice.”

“I’ll be out of custody within hours. We own the LAPD.”

“But you don’t own me. I need you to take me to Manetti.”

“For what?”

“I need to talk to your boss so I can square things with his competition.”

“You mean Carmine.”

“Exactly.”

After the crime scene was vetted, Chang led Jack to the underground nexus of Manetti’s operation, which was basically a bunker behind a large palatial Bel Air mansion. It was quite breathtaking and unexpected. The bunker was equipped with all the modern amenities and it was like walking into a Marriot in Las Vegas. Armed guards patted Jack down and finally he was able to talk to the boss. Manetti was seated behind a mahogany desk smoking a cigar. He was anxious to relieve Chang and make a deal. Jack was stone-faced and tight-lipped like a poker player.

“So Mr. Green, what can I do for you?” Manetti rasped like a notorious gangster.

“You know what I want Mr. Manetti,” Jack said assertively. “I’m trying to shut down Carmine’s operation.”

“That’s a tall order,” Manetti assumed. “How do you propose doing that?”

“I need you to call an end to the in-fighting,” Jack requested. “Once Carmine loses interest, he won’t be so much on the defense.”

“Carmine has 30,000 men on the streets,” Manetti said coldly. “How can one man stop him?”

“He’s not above the law,” Jack contravened. “We will get him.”

“How?”

“He has a compound off the coast of Santa Cruz,” Jack divulged. “We plan to infiltrate the compound from the water.”

“Who says you won’t perish,” Manetti asked solemnly.

“We are experts,” Jack reassured him. “We won’t turn around either.”

“What happens to my businesses and reputation?”

“We want the bigger fish. This guy is a cop killer. We want to stop him for good.”

“There must be some other reason?”

“Like what?”

“Well you tell me?”

“Okay. You’re the only person who can ensure that Manetti stays put. If he’s busy directing his soldiers he won’t have time to think of anything else.”

“You mean?”

“I just need you to cause some alarm and panic, that’s all.”

“That’s sort of my forte.”

“I Know.”

“What about Jason? I want him released.”

Chang who is handcuffed is pushed forward by Jack with a light shove.

“You can have him. So do we have a deal?”

“Yes. But Mr. Green, I want you to know one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“When you’re playing with four aces, there’s no such thing as a royal flush.”

Manetti’s compound was off the coast of Santa Cruz in a quay. It was a palatial retreat covered with palms and exquisite architecture. It was Spanish colonial influence and had belonged to an old Hollywood director before Manetti converted it into a private island. It was closely monitored and heavily guarded. Jack would need some blueprints and a professional team. Someone who was adept at swimming. Carmine would be kept busy with the racketeering. Meanwhile, it was important to sweep some of Carmine’s associates and take them along for the ride.

Jack hit the streets of San Francisco to hunt the conmen. He was on the trail of Carmine’s right hand, Vinnie “The Butcher”. The Butcher was known for extreme acts such as intimidation, bribery and coercion. When someone crossed him, they would be sure to wind up missing or floating in the San Francisco bay. One of his hangouts, The Flamingo, was an exotic night club that he owned and operated and conducted all of his business. Jack would need to round him up and use his facial features to create a false ID. It could work and Vinnie would have to be the scapegoat.

Jack entered the exotic bar on the pretenses of a patron. It was on a quiet street in downtown San Francisco on a rainy night. The bar was situated in a narrow alley, with a motor inn adjacent to it. The windows of the motor inn overlooked the bar

and a fire escape seemed to intertwine with scaffolding above the bar. It was quite a complex design. Jack walked inside with some other guests and blended in with them. He sat at a table and ordered a shot of whiskey. He gulped it and it seemed to make him mellow. The strippers were dancing on a stage and booths and the main area was separated by a black velvet curtain. The strippers were going in and out from the curtain to their changing rooms. A bouncer stood outside the curtain overlooking everything. Some college kids or frats were sitting at the foot of the stage drinking and boozing. They seemed out of it. Other than that, it was a typical night club with cocktail waitresses, bartenders and a boisterous crowd. Jack would have to weave between them. He had his eye out for Vinnie. Finally, a couple of men in suits and scoped out the bar. They eyed one of the patrons, who was likely a debtor, and pulled him from his seat and took him behind the curtain. This was Jack's chance to make his entrance. He requested that he go behind the curtain to check on the man who was his business partner. The bouncer blocked him, and would not let Jack get close. Jack cracked a joke, that the bouncer looked like a sphinx. This drew ire and the bouncer cocked back and swung at Jack. It was perfect timing and Jack saw it coming. He ducked and knocked the bouncer out with a punch in the mid-section. He went down and no one seemed to notice among the loud atmosphere.

Jack ventured behind the curtain. There was a green door that likely led to an office. Jack could hear some loud yelling and pleas behind the door; obviously, the collectors were exacting their toll. Jack would need a diversion. He noticed the fire alarm encased in a glass housing along the wall. This would create some havoc. Jack smashed the housing and pulled the alarm lever. The alarm system came on and everyone was roused and started scrambling out. When the door opened, Jack brandished a .22 and made his way into the room. He directed everyone to a corner and had the mob guys ditch their weapons. He then turned to Vinnie who was sitting behind a desk eating grapes. He was a lot like his picture, only fatter and more compact. His face was covered with stubble.

"FBI," Jack yelled. "No quick moves."

"Prove it," Vinnie hissed like a snake.

Jack removed his FBI tag on his neck that was tied to a chain. It was his cover for his operation.

"See," he said. "Now don't make any moves."

"Who are you?" Vinnie insisted.

"I'm Jack Green," Jack stated keeping his gun steady. "You have to come with me."

"What's the charge?" Vinnie asked adamantly.

"Racketeering and running an illicit brothel," Jack asserted.

“Prove it,” Vinnie hollered.

“We have evidence you are involved in massive racketeering operation. The hotel above us is being used as a brothel. We have surveillance of girls flowing in and out of the hotel on your tab,” Jack reeled off.

“Hahaha,” Vinnie chuckled. “No jury in this state would convict me.”

Jack looked at him coldly. “You still have to give yourself up.”

“Why don’t we sit and talk about this like men,” Vinnie offered.

“I’m better standing,” Jack retorted.

“Suit yourself,” Vinnie said under his breath. “But if this was true, where’s your backup?”

“We don’t want to cause any alarm,” Jack explained. “I work alone.”

“A lone ranger,” Vinnie cackled. “Out to stop crime I bet.”

“What’s it to you?” Jack asked.

“Nothing. I just wanted to clear things up.” Vinnie wobbled in his chair. It was an old leather chair with springs. It was a strong chair and seemed to withstand his weight.

Jack turned to the men in the corner and directed them to the door. Meanwhile, Vinnie looked on and seemed perplexed. The men stood by the door for further instructions. Jack’s focus was Vinnie and to put him under arrest.

“Do you know why they call me the Cleaver,” Vinnie asked abruptly.

Jack turned to him. “Why?”

“When I was young I worked for a butcher,” Vinnie started to tell a story. “Every day I would go there after school and help slice the meat. Sirloin, top round, porterhouse, anything you can think of. It was a dirty job. I remember I would come home smelling like cow guts. I hated that smell. My apron would be covered with stains.”

Jack was rapt by the story.

“Then one day a couple of kids tried to rob me after school. They were five of them and I was only one. They had the upper hand. They took all my money and I was distraught. You know what I did?”

“What?”

“I went to the shop and I got my apron, put it on, found the kids outside the school, and took off one of the kid’s ears with a cleaver. They never bothered me again. And after that, everyone around the school gave me that nickname.”

“Interesting,” Jack commented.

“So as you can tell I don’t like being harassed,” Vinnie went on. “So I have a habit of making fine cuts that are exquisite.”

Jack looked at him with consternation.

“Would like you to see my cleaver?” Vinnie asked.

“No thanks,” Jack refuted.

Vinnie didn’t seem to balk and reached for the desk drawer as Jack looked on with awe. The cleaver appeared in Vinnie’s hand and was stainless steel and glinting. It had a wooden handle that was old and worn but the cleaver looked like an executioner’s device. It was the proverbial cleaver that was attributed to the Butcher.

“Any choice cuts?” Vinnie asked slyly.

At that moment, one of the mob guys tried to sack Jack but seemed to stumble and became discombobulated. Immediately, Jack responded and fired striking the man and he went down. At that same moment, out of the corner Jack’s eye, the cleaver came swinging down at Jack and missed by inches. It lodged into the desk as Vinnie struggled to free it. At that same moment, Jack knocked him back with the butt with his gun, making him fall back into his chair and toppled over. Jack grabbed the cleaver and pressed it against his neck.

“You forgot to smile,” Jack winked at him.

Jack walked the street s of LA In a pensive mood. He had captured Vinnie and the boys downtown were working on him. There was no doubt he would give up the goods. Carmine had to be stopped once and for all so the streets could be safer. For too long, Carmine had had a grip on LA’s drug world and it was time that he was stopped. Manetti was just a broker in a large deal to snare Carmine, but Jack was privy that the former could also prove a real threat. Carmine’s takedown could lead to a shift in the underworld and Manetti’s boys could easily rule. Giving Manetti a free pass was weighing on Jack. The streets of LA were deserted and black. Mist seemed to swirl in circles among the streets. A sigh seemed to whisper through the avenues. Jack walked among the stillness of the night. A couple walked by in an embrace. They seemed like the only ones out. Jack gazed at them as they walked further and further away with large hollow eyes. He longed for Penny but she seemed out of reach. He was consumed by his job and the risks were too great. As a Narcotics cop, he always had to watch over his shoulder. He wondered if he could

ever lead a normal life with Penny. Jack turned onto Rodeo. The houses were palatial and the arches and columns seemed glazed with ivory. The streets were damp and wet and the moonlight reflected on the water. Jack walked on until he reached the cloister where Penny's apartment was located. The silk curtains were blowing in the breeze and it reminded him of Penny's touch. He simply gazed up at the window and stared endlessly thinking of Penny. He hoped the case would be over soon and that the risks of busting a major drug trafficker would be over. He hated putting Penny in the middle but it was a double-edged sword- she was involved with the media coverage and he was the cop overseeing the case. It was a thin line and Jack knew when to pull the plug.

Vinny had agreed to cooperate. The next morning, an elite team was huddled in a helicopted heading to the quay where they would board a ship with sonar to Carmine's island. Jack and several of the SWAT team were packed inside the chopper waiting to be deployed. Once they reached the quay, they would board the ship by slinging down from ropes. Nick seemed to be in a playful mood.

"I hope nobody needs to use the bathroom," he joked.

It seemed outrageous with everyone in drop position. The landing zone was below and they began rappelling down one by one. It was a long descent, roughly 3,000 feet, but they did it easily and expertly. They landed like a flock of seagulls onto the liner and unhooked themselves. The chopper flew away on a quiet angle. The liner was a military style vessel with sonar. It would take the team across the strait towards Carmine's compound. The sonar would detect any anomalies or traps. This ship was high-tech and could also vanish from radar with the touch of a button. Sort of a like a ghost ship. The team stood at the bow right behind the sprit and watched the vessel pierce the choppy waves. The water was rough on this coast and seemed to have strong currents. In the midst of a vast landscape, it seemed like a Japanese oil painting. The vessel detected some radio signals and slightly changed course. It raised its speed to fifty knots to avoid being spotted by rotating guards. The island was slowly coming into view. A beach was coming into focus. From here, the elite team would make its way into the compound. In the darkness, they finally made landing. The infiltration team scooped down on rafts, one for every four, and paddled to the shore. There, they donned their infrared, concealed the rafts in some reeds, and crawled towards the compound. They could see rotating guards at the walls of the compound, and armed men. They would have to split up and ambush the armed guards. Jack and two others moved east and the other members took the opposite flank. They were all in position with the guards above them who were oblivious. Jack made the call.

"This is Alpha one. We're in position. Execute Phase one."

The company acting in tandem, swept in to make the kill. One by one the armed guards were taken out with fast action and their throats were cut. The bodies were

tossed over the sandy mound. It was time to infiltrate the outer perimeter. The outer perimeter was guarded by a watchtower with one man looking out from a nest. They would have to come up with a brilliant plan to take out the sentry. They would need a distraction. Something small as not to alarm the guard but to draw his attention. Once distracted, the backup unit could easily get within firing range, setup a laser, and score a headshot. It was a dandy plan. Jack would create the decoy. It was a simple trick. They would use a golf ball and hit it into the air as if someone was fooling around. It was enough harebrained to work. Jack flicked the balls into the air and let them sail in eyeshot of the sentry. It was a curious sight and the man was distracted long enough and bewildered. In the meantime, the sharpshooters got into position, mounted a laser on a scope, and hit the bull's-eye. The man dropped out of sight. It seemed like phase two was complete.

It was time to enact Phase three. They would have to enter the compound and bypass the security systems. This was fairly easy. Their security expert Alan Keyes was perfect for the job. He knew every hack in the book. He would easily bypass all the security codes by accessing a panel. Getting to the panel was the hard part. He would need some kind of cover so the guards behind the glass windows would not detect him. They were pacing in front of the windows in crisscross fashion. The panel was located behind an apple blossom and mounted on a wall. It would be tricky to get Alan beyond this point. The team thought of a plan. They were nestled behind a mound that overlooked the compound. They could take the guards out with precise bullets but it could raise alarm. They wanted to be extra covert. Plus, Alan could trigger the laser wires that surrounded the entire perimeter. The first task was to cut the laser wire. It's main port was located near a security gate that was monitored by cameras. Alan took out his Toughbook. He easily over looped the cameras to play the same footage over and over. The point man cut off the laser wires. Now they could get closer to the targets. Jake crawled through the dirt and pulled up near the bay windows. The guards were still pacing unawares. He flicked off a power switch that knocked out the front lights. This would cause a stir and make the guards come out without too much of a scene. When they popped out, Jake took them out with back to back slashes to the throat. Now Alan could get to the panel. He quickly worked his magic and deactivated the security system. This meant the entire compound was defenseless and at their disposal. They could freely roam about.

The team entered the main floor and split up, like a flag formation. They stormed every room taking out the guards and bagging the evidence. Tons of it was all over the compound including cash, drugs, and weapons. They finally circumambulated the marble staircase that wound all the way to the top. There they saw a heavily clad door that was likely Carmine's layer. They would need some heavy firepower to blast through it. Their demolition expert Will Powers, setup a radio controlled IED that was activated by a switch. The switch went on and the team backed off, until a simultaneous activation knob delivered a explosion that rocked the door. The

heavy-laden door lay open and behind clouds of smoke and dust, scrambled Carmine's bodyguards and a balcony where Carmine was boarding a chopper. The guards fired rounds hitting Joe and Mike, the team's superior officers with gunfire that pierced their armor and were grazing. While they stood back and gathered themselves, the rest of the team fell in, marking off the targets with deadly precision and aim. Meanwhile Carmine's chopper was drifting away with the team still grounded. No one had planned for a chopper to be present and there was no _____ for it. Jake would need to act spontaneously. He could only think of using a hook to rappel onto the choppers skids. It was a dangerous maneuver but it worked. The hook latched on and Jake was pull up by the rope as the chopper drifted over the white seas, fighting to get away. The team looked on as Jake dangled by the rope as the chopper continued to veer off the mainland. Slowly Jake began making progress up the rope and to the chopper's side. It was a riveting scene. The team witnessed Jake ripping out one of the rebels and subduing Carmine long enough to eject. Both Carmine and Jake seemed to free fall from the chopper as a a parachute released and the two men drifted until landing into the sea. Minutes later a torpedo hit the chopper that came from a distress call to the coast guard acting in tandem with the navy. Soon, Jake and Carmine were fished out of the water in a Blackhawk and flown to the mainland. Carmine was in custody and Jake had done the unthinkable.

Back at headquarters, Carmine was grilled for his involvement in the racketeering conspiracy. With so much evidence piled against him, the case against him was water-tight. The detectives knew they had Carmine boxed in for a long time, and there was no getting out of this one. Jake _____ behind the one-way mirror, while looking at Carmine in a prison uniform. He definitely had brought down a big-time kingpin and put him away for good. The memory of Billy seemed to call out to him. It had been a long road since that violent shootout at the docks that had led here. It was time to close this chapter in his police story.

Jake returned to his apartment and took a shower that seemed to wipe away all the stress that he had endured since the case started. When he got out he felt renewed. The Moorish bathroom was a perfect place to restore himself by shaving and combing his hair. He sprayed some cologne and freshened up with some new clothes – a Hawaiian shirt and khakis. It felt good to be dressed down and for the first time, in a long time, he left his piece behind him.

Jake hopped into the convertible and drove down the palm-lined highway that was blustery to Penny's house. Finally, he would be able to tell her the good news and perhaps, feel like a regular couple. He longed to see her. The drive was smooth, and he felt a sense of freedom like he never felt before. He turned onto Penny's street and pulled into the driveway. But instead of getting out, he honked the horn, and watched intently as Penny stepped out onto the balcony and gazed at him. She looked heavenly in a white summer dress that seemed airy and loose and her red hair was simply divine. He seemed transfixed in her eyes. She was barefoot when

she walked out and whisked herself into the car and they drove off. They headed for the shoreline and used the coastal highway where they had taken their first drive. The red, orange hues of the sun seemed to glimmer off the California coast. It made everything shimmer and give off vitality. The wind was blowing through Penny's hair and parting from her eyes. The scenery was heightened by her fair complexion and eyes. They drove for several miles before they even spoke.

"So Carmine is no longer in business," Jake broke out/broke the news.

"What are you saying Jake," Penny looked at him skeptically.

"It's true," Jake reiterated. "He's been shut down. We finally bagged him. He's no longer in operation."

"When did this happen?" Penny asked coyly.

"Yesterday," Jake replied. "We were able to raid his compound and take him out. We found tons of evidence. The paper trail is pretty long, He won't be able to get out of this one."

"That's wonderful, Jake," Penny blushed. "You have to let me break the story in the paper."

"Well, you definitely have the inside scoop," Jake acknowledged. "You earned it."

Penny smiled and her eyes seemed bashful. She was humbled by the honor. They pulled up to a rest stop on the California highway. Penny gazed over at the ocean as it stood out like an endless blue horizon. The night sky brought out its dark tones and its waters seemed to hold memories that seemed as deep as the bottom. They rested on top of the leather seats for an elevated look and marveled at the scenery. The ordeal was over and it felt like they were safe and . Jake looked over at Penny and her moon-face filled him with immense love and affection. They looked into each other eyes, with the ocean in the backdrop and kissed, as if their souls were joined in an eternal embrace.

The ship set sail quietly from the marina. The elite team stood at the bow right behind the sprit and watched the

His legs felt stiff under the concrete but he kept pushing on. His mind was filled with thoughts- the case, Billy's murder and Carmine's

They planned to use speedboats and a previously belonged to an old Hollywood director but had been converted into a small fortress. No one had ever seen the inside of the retreat. Everything was closely monitored and patrolled.

It was a small island fortress that was impenetrable and had never been photographed. Carmine had strict rules. It was surrounded by a large stucco barrier, surrounded by guards, patrols by dogs and canines, and heavily armored. It was impossible to

Jack hits the streets and recruits an informant/insider to help him navigate the compound.

Penny and Jack gather evidence on Carmine’s illicit drug trafficking

Jack infiltrates the compound

Jack meets with Penny

Yakuza

Carmines compound

They were part of LA's shadowy underworld.

deal with a middleman. His name is Suarez. He delivers the drugs by van and picks up the money by van.

Without some kind of coercion, he knew the informant would never talk. With his partner dead, there was little the could do to

They talked while Jack made passes. Jack tried to convince to give up the done on Carmine for immunity and protection.

Jack would need to close in on Carmine's associates if there was any chance at retribution. He would have to seek out the Chinese mafia to get closer to the truth. Perhaps, the prostitue coud still be a worthy tip. Now that the cat was out of the bag, what would it matter if she re If they were running drugs for him, p

By now Carmine was heading out the door and Jack was entangled with two fatheads. It was just another hassle in the long line of opponents. But Jack was composed and alert. He managed to fend off the brutes with several kicks and

crosses and finally a headbutt that shut out the lights on one of the creeps. The remaining one was subdued by so

"I see."

"So I would advise you to back off."

"I have

He had business to take care of. He would need some kind of angle to get her to cooperate.

"I am looking for Vicent Carmine," Jack said bluntly, hoping he could jar her.

"Hey, so you are a cop," she protested.

"No," Jack denied it. "I am looking to do business with him. Can you tell me where I can find him."

"What sort of business, huh?" she asked _____.

"It's personal," Jack explained. "Can you tell me where I can get a hold him."

"I don't think Vicent would like to bothered by complete strangers."

"I am not a complete stranger."

"So who are you?"

"I am Jack Green. I'm an LA cop. I have to talk to your boss."

"Talk to him about."

"A dead cop."

"Why should I help you?"

"Carmine is on the FBI watchlist. He could be in hot water if there is any link to him. I just want to make sure he's cleared."

"

Penny discovers some financial holdings on Carmine

Jack investigates Manetti surveillance

Jack and Penny talk walk on the boardwalk reminisce

Jack questions the inmate

Inmate leads Jack to an escort who can implicate Carmine

Carmine sting operation-- Jack wears a wire

Carmine's compound last stand

Jack also discovers Chinese agents on Carmines payroll who are waging a war on Manetti's turf- and also are responsible for the large-scale opium trade from China to LA shores

was cold and barren, and he expected to see one of the officers at his station. When he looked down the hallyway, and saw the empty chair, it

Flower pots littered the balcony. Jack walked up to the sliding gate and hoped it might open.

Jack

Jack stuck the pen knife in the table that silenced them. "Look familiar."

He would no doubt find the perpetrator who had visited him. In the back, on a roundtable, a couple of men were laughing and playing cards. Jack walked up to them with a cold and blank stare.

Her high cheeks were a prominent feature. Jack looked at her every now and then and was captivated. She was truly a beautiful TV reporter. The Pacific Ocean went by along the highway in a serene

The perpetrators seemed too standoffish as if they were protecting something. Jack looked around the warehouse hoping to find clues. He looked around some dark spaces and corners. He was looking for anything that might be linked to the perpetrators or that could tie them to a larger conspiracy. In a back room, under some boards, he found what he was looking for.

A chain link fence surrounded the structure but there were several openings cut out by vagrants. Jack passed through one of the openings.

into a Nico groaned in pain while the onlookers looked on in amazement.

Ernie addressed him in a sly tone. “

went up his dresser. He looked at himself and contemplated his inner being. It was vacant like any cops. He rubbed his face that seemed hardened and gritty. It was like looking at a stranger. Jack

“Today a brazen robbery took place inside the Cold Creamery and Dairy Farm run by Nicolleti Sorvino. The robbers seemed to have entered the facility at night and had awakened the guards. The guards were tied up and blindfolded. A unknown sum and property was hauled off. No one knows the whereabouts of the robbers. Anyone with information is asked to call crime stoppers.”

“So what made you lose it,” Jack asked bluntly.

“What do you mean,” the man said offhandedly.

“I mean, aiming at a cop is pretty risky,” Jack ascertained.

“I don’t like fucking cops,” the man replied _____.

“There has to be something more to it,” Jack pondered.

“Nothing more than that,” the man confessed.

same and had won favor with all the sergeants and deputies. worked for the same precinct for twenty years but it felt like only ten. Probably because he preferred the gritty downtown LA streets that kept him

John had moved to a new house on Baker street and had started renovations right away.